IOW
Early Homes / Families
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SMITHFIELD BRANCH

# Early Homes & Families In Isle of Wight County, Virginia.

The first reference to this section of Virginia, now known as Isle of Wight is to be found in Captain John Smith's History . Returning from Kecoughtan in the spring of 1608 where he had gone to trade for supplies he says, " With fifteen bushels of corn I returned toward our fort . By the way I encountered with two canoes of Indians , who came aboard me, being the inhabitants of Warrasquoacke , a Kingdom on the southside of the river , which is in breadth five miles and twenty miles or near from the mouth . With these I traded, who having but their hunting provisions requested me to retutn to their town, where I should load my boat with corn, and with near thirty bushels I returned to the fort".

The first English settlement was begun by Captain Christopher Lawne, and Sir Richard Worsley , Knight Baronet and their associates . They arrived at Jamestown on April 19th , 1619 with one hundred settlers in a ship commanded by Captain Evans and immediately setttled near the mouth of a creek on the southside of the James River , still known as Lawne's Creek . ( The present boundary line between Surry and Isle of Wight Counties ). Captain Lawne and Ensign Washer represented the settlement known as Lawne's Plantation in the first representative assembly held in America , which met at Jamestown on the 30th day of July 1619. It seems to be a fact , that all new settlements are unhealthy and this one proved to be remarkably so , for within a year Captain Lawne died , and four- fifths of those he brought with him also ; for the company on November 30th, 1620 ordered that , " in regard of the late mortality of the persons transported heretofore by the late Captain Lawne , his associates be granted till mid-summer 1625, to make up the number of persons they were disposed to bring". It also declared that the plantation was to be henceforth called , Isle of Wight Plantation . This name was given it very probably because the famous " Isle of Wight " off the coast of England had been the home of some of the principal patentees ; at least one of them we know was certainly from Isle of Wight ; Sir Richard Worsley.

( An abstract of the will of Captain Lawne may be of interest .) Christopher Lawne of Blanford , Dorset , now living in Virginia --- November 2, 1619 , bequest to daughter -in- law Anne Olliffe; to Robert Olliffe , to wife Susanna my tobacco and sassafras in Virginia , and my bill of adventure . Executors , sons Lovewell and Symon Lawne . Overseers of will in Virginia, Captain Nathaniel Powell , Mr. Samuel Macocke, and Captain Ralph Hamor. Overseers , friends Mr. Lawrence Anthony, of London, Mr. John White of Oxford, Mr. Richard Ellis of St, Lythinge's Lane, London, Dorset and Mr . William Willis of Woore, Dorset. Witnesses : Nathaniel West. Pharoah Flynton,. Administration granted June 17, 1620 to William Willis during minority of Lovewell and Symon Lawne.

From uncalendared papers , Court of Request im London , 1629 - 30 the following testimony is found . Justinian Cooper of London Gent. Plaintiff has been " for divers yeares last past a planter in your Highness Country of Virginia ", and " hath spent much time there in laborious and industrious plantacion of tobacco " etc. Justinian Cooper of London Gent. and Anne his wife testify that in 1618 one Christopher Lawne of Blanford , Dorset , who had married Susanna , natural mother of your subject, Anne , did intend to make an adventure and journey into Virginia . Your subject Anne being a young maid and unmarried , and bearing the name of Anne Olliffe , did not only adventure her person, but the sum of L40 in the scheme . They went over and the said Christopher lived there in good fashion with much increase of his estate until about five years since , when he died leaving a large property . This has come into the hands of his widow Susan . Anne has received no payment of her share . There was an agreement between Christopher Lawne and Susan about twelve years since and one John White and William Willis uncle and friend of Anne and of one Robert Olliffe , brother of Anne . Susan her mother has since married one John Witchfield , Anne became twenty - one , three or four years ago. Susan pretends that the money was paid to a former husband of Anne's. Statement made that Anne had married James Harrison in Virginia, ten years since.

It is remarkable that locations, dates and names of the earliest settlers should be so well known. Among those brought over by Lawne was Nathaniel Basse , who in 1621 established another settlement known as " Basses Choice on Pagan River " . In his " Muster " was Banjamin Symmes who in 1623 left property to start a free school , the first in America . ( Established at Kecoughtan ) . This whole settlement was wiped out in the Indian Massacre of 1622 . Basse was in England at the time , and thus escaped the fate of his colonist . The land was repatented by Peter Knight, who probably married a daughter of Basse's . He sold his holdings to John Bland, the eminent London Merchant in 1659 . Thomas Taberer purchased the land in 1675 , and served as Burgess from the county . He died leaving no sons , but many descendants through his daughters, who married into the Copeland, Newman, Webb and Jordan Families.

In 1622 Edward Bennett, a rich merchant of London and a member of the company , in partnership with his brother Robert and his nephew Richard Bennett came with one hundred and twenty settlers and established themselves at a place on the James River still known as " The Rocks ". Beautiful box trees attest the age claimed for this estate . The former house stood a little in front of the present one, part of the original foundation having been recently found when some landscaping was being done . [redacted].

Edward Bennett's moiety of the above tract was about 1500 acres, which by a deed , recorded in the Secretary's Office dated in 1663 , was divided between his two daughters ; Silvestra the wife of Major NicholasHill and Mary the wife of Thomas Bland . ( Later she became the wife of Mr. Luke Cropley of London ). Silvestra's share of the land was the upper portion ( which included " The Rocks " ). Mary's share being the lower moiety which included the section known until a few years ago as Days Point and for the last twenty - five years as Morgarts Beach .

A letter of interest is preserved from Robert Bennett, Merchant , of " Bennett's Welcome in Virginia " , dated June 9, 1623 , to his brother Edward Bennett . In it he refers to his own children in London, to Edward's wife , and to his brother Richard and the latter's wife . Robert Bennett died during the year 1623 .

In a deposition dated in 1623 , Richard Bennett the nephew of Edward stated his age to be twenty . In 1629 he was a Burgess and in 1639 a member of the Council . He was a Puritan in sympathy and when Sir William Berkeley in 1649 drove the Puritans out of Nansemond and Eliazabth City County , he went with them to Maryland , but only stayed a short time. He served as Governor of Virginia from 1652- 1655 .

Other Bennett references in the early records includes one from Mr. William Bennett, Minister , who stated that Mr. Robert Bennett , merchant , late deceased owes him as minister to his plantation 1533½ pounds of tobacco for his salary for two years.

These settlements were planted on the eve of the Great Massacre of 1622, many miraculous escapes were reported in the Warracquoacke settlements , with fifty three known to have perished . The result was for a time all plantations from Hog Island down the River for fourteen miles were deserted . In the fall of the same year an expedition by Sir George Yeardley drove out the Warrisquoacke and Nansemond Indians burning their Villages and confiscating their corn. In May 1623 , Capt. Roger Smith was ordered to build a fort , the proprietors of the abandoned settlements took heart and returned to their homes.

The census of 1623 - 24 showed as living at Warrisquoacke and Basses Choice ., fifty three persons, stating that twenty six have died since last April . Disease proved to be a more disasterous enemy than the Indians for the census of the next year showed but thirty one persons alive at the same place. Four years later the colony entered upon a more prosperous era and a continous stream of immigrants to whom patents were granted had its beginning about that date . In 1635 the population had grown to five hundred and twenty two inhabitants .

This County claims the distinction of having the oldest protestant church on the continent standing on its soil . Tradition states this church known as the " Old Brick Church" was built by Joseph Bridger in 1632 , thus antedating the church at Jamestown by seven years . The points in common between the two edifices are a tower at the western end facing almost the same point of the compass , and a chancel door on the southside near the eastern end of the nave. The Isle of Wight Church is a larger building than the one now at Jamestown . The brick work is also more intricate , being laid in the so called Flemish bond and its tower has articulated pilasters at the western corners ; broad friezes at each story and under the eaves . If 1632 is the correct date for this Church it is hard to explain why a more pretentious building should be built seven years earlier in a primeval forest, than the one finally erected in the Capitol of the Colony . So far no trace of a Joseph Bridger who could have been the builder of the church has been found . The one whose tombstone was placed in the church when it was restored , was only four years of age in 1632 . The following is the inscription on the stone , which many people claim indicates he was born in England and had not come to Virginia , until he had spent some time at court .

Sacred
To The Memory of
The Honorable Joseph Bridger

Esq. Councillor of State In Virginia
To King Charles The 2nd.
Dying April the 15: A.D. 1686
Aged 58 yeares . Mournfuly left
His Wife , 3 sons & 4 daughters ,

Does nature silent mourn and can dumb stone
Make her true worth to future ages known .
Excess expression marble fine will keep ,
His memory best that ever on his grave shall weep .
Here lies the late great minister of State ,
That Royal virtues had & Royal fate ,
To Charles his Councels did such honor bring ,
His own express fetched him to attend the King ,
His soul that ever did with vigor move ,
Nimbly took wings soared likes itself above.

The Bridger home , " Whitemarsh " was not acquired by Col. Bridger until 1673 ; " John Perry , son of Phillip Perry , of ye Whitemarsh to Col. Jospph Bridger ". Since only a few bricks remain to mark the site it may be of interest to form some idea of the house from the rooms mentioned in his inventory ; upper chamber of the old brick house , in the next chamber , in the first chamber of the first story , in the next chamber , dining room , children's chamber, uppermost chamber of the new house , middle uppermost chamber, third chamber over the dining room , the gallery , parlor , hall, lower chamber, kitchen chamber, outer chamber-landing, kitchen and cellar . Col. Bridger was a Burgess from Isle of Wight ; a commissioner to adjust the boundary with Maryland ; a commissioner to confer with Maryland and North Carolina in regards to tobacco cultivation , commander in chief of horse in Isle of Wight , Surry Nansemond and lower Norfolk Counties , and in 1670 he was appointed a member of the Council . He died possessed with a large personal estate valued at L816 -17 S. & 4 P. owning 12000 acres in Isle of Wight , besides other lands in Surry , James City and Maryland . Col. Bridger married Hester Pitt , the daughter of Lt. Col. Robert Pitt and left three sons and four daughters as proven from the above tombstone record.

Across Brewer's Creek from Whitemarsh , stands an oblong brick house with large chimneys on either end , known as the Brewer home, . Quite high on one chimney you are able to decipher the date 1679 , several feet lower on the same chimney is one of 1710 . John Brewer was a member of the house of Burgesses in 1657 , and this family has been prominently indentified with history of Nansemond County.

The Pitt family was founded by two brothers , Robert and Henry , sons of William Pitt of Bristol , England . Robert served as Lieutenant - Colonel of the County Militia , and later as a member of the Council . His home was on the Nansemond County Line , his property forming part of the boundary between the two counties . Nothing remains to mark the site of his house but a small brick building , which tradition says was used as a fort for this section of the county and as a refuge for the colonist from the hostile Indians . Within the memory of the present generation the " Port Holes " in the building have been filled in . Robert Pitt died in 1672 , his wife at the time of his death was Martha Lear , sister of Col. John Lear of Nansemond ; leaving several sons and daughters .

In the year 1663 the General Assembly rewarded John Pitt the son of Col. Robert Pitt for building a vessel of twenty - eight tons . Henry Pitt's home was located on Jone's Creek and referred to in the records as " Pitts Manor Plantation " . An inventory of Thomas Pitt's estate , the son of Henry names the following rooms in the house : hall , kitchen , entry, parlor, pantry , hall,-chamber , parlor chamber , porch chamber , and upper entry . The descendants of the brothers have intermarried with the prominent families of the county .

Upon the petition in 1656 , of the inhabitants of Ragged Island and Terrascoe Neck then in Nansemond County , they were put into Isle of Wight . The greater part of the Island was owned by the Norsworthy family , originating with " Lt. Col. Trisham Norsworthy of ye Ragged Island in Virginia . Gent.," as he is referred to in the Lower Norfolk County Records . He represented Upper Norfolk County in the House of Burgesses in 1639 . The old home has been destroyed by fire , but the tombstones on the Island mark the approximate location of their settlement.

Col. Joseah Parker the outstanding Revolutionary figure from Isle of Wight , owned an estate known as " Macclesfield " . His immigrant ancestor had patented the land in 1650 and is in that part of the county known as Smith's Neck . In 1775 , Col. Parker was made a member of the County Committee of Safety , and a member of the Virginia Conventions that met in March , June and December . He entered the service as a Major and was made a Colonel April 1, 1778 . He greatly distinguished himself at the Battle of Trenton . In the noted picture of the Capture of the Hessians at Trenton by Trumbell , Col. Parker is placed on the left side , and painted from life . His descendants own a valuable and interesting correspondance from General Lafayette .

An act of Assembly in 1691 provided for a town to be laid out at the mouth of the Pagan River . Fifty acres were bought of Joseph Bridger and surveyed into lots and called Newport , later known as Patesfield , then Old Town when Smithfield was incorporated , and now as Battery Park . Arthur Smith and Thomas Taberer were appointed ffeofees in trust for ye disposing of deeds for town land , and in 1776 the ffeofees appointed for Patesfield were Brewer Godwin , Richard Hardy and Henry Pitt , Gentlemen . A small but interesting old house is in the town erected by the first Todd in the County , who was a Bermudian . The house is a replica of Toddsbury in Gloucester County , Va . Doubtless both being copies of the same English Todd home .

Isle of Wight not satisfied with her other assertions of priority claims also the first grist mill erected in Virginia . It was built in 1646 by George Hardy who patented 300 acres on Lawnes Creek . The mill later came into the possession of the Wrenn family , and is now known as Wrenn's Mill . Members of the Hardy family served as Burgesses and the man who is generally conceded to have been Isle of Wight's most brilliant son belonged to this family . Samuel Hardy was a member of the first Continental Congress , and died during its session in Philadelphia . He signed with Thomas Jefferson , Arthur Lee and James Monroe the documents conveying to the United States all the"rights of Virginia to the territory , northwestward of the River Ohio " . His untimely death is thought to have cut short a brilliant career . Alexander Hamilton wrote a poem to his memory extolling his virtues and telling of the loss to his country.

To return to the James River section, which was left to chronologically take up the Old Brick Church , in the will of Mrs . Silvestra Hill , dated 1706 a bequest is made of 550 acres to her dear friend Mary Baker the wife of Captain Henry Baker . The Bakers first established a house at " Shoal Bay " and presumably gave it it's name . The claim is made , that here the first formal garden in Virginia was started . It is one of the show places in the State , With the beauty of its teracces , marvelous box and stately crepe myrtles . The house was burned shortly after the " War between the States " and it was perhaps the most pretentious colonial home is Isle of Wight, at least the grounds would indicate it . To the left of the modern house , now on the place, is a brick building , which was erected from the bricks of the Old Bay Church . After this church was abandoned , ( the church of the upper Parish ), The bricks were removed , while the Cocke family owned Shoal Bay , and the present house built . This sanctuary was further desecrated by having its wood work constructed into a horse stable ; which no sooner was built , tradition tell us then lightening struck it and burned it to the ground .

Captain Nathaniel Bacon Sr. had large holdings in Isle of Wight which fell to his heiress , Abigail Smith , his neice , who married Major Lewis Burwell of Gloucester County . By degrees the Burwells absorbed much of the land in the neighborhood. An advertisement appears in the Virginia Gazette describing the Burwell estate as being ten miles below Hog Island , containing 35,000 acres whereon are three plantations cleared and in good order for cropping , sufficient to work thirty five hands . On the Manor Plantation , ( Shoal Bay ---- Nathaniel Burwell purchased it from Lawrence Baker in 1717 ) is a handsome brick house 60 ft. by 26 , two stories high, well finished and wainscoted , with two brick houses, 40 ft. by 20 , barns stables, and every other necessary houses ; a handsome garden completely laid off, a hundred and five yards by seventy five . On the three plantations there are about seventeen hundred apple trees and a great variety of other fruit .

Several miles above " Shoal Bay " is an interesting house , doubtless one of the three referred to in the advertisement . The ends of this house are of brick , it has a gable roof and dormer windows . There is a secret outlet from an upstairs room leading to a passage to the river . All of the woodwork in the house is interesting with one room beautifully panelled . Warrasquoacke Bay is now known as Burwell's Bay .

The lower part of Edward Bennett's grant fell to the heirs of his daughter Mary Bland . In 1681 this land was in the possession of Col. James Day . Dr. Tyler believes he acquired it through a Bland marriage , however others have reached the conclusion that this Mary Bland was his own mother, rather than his mother in-law , being a son by marriage prior to the Bland one . The Day family retained possession of this property until the early part of this century . All trace of the old house has disappeared . The family has remained one of prominence throughout the years .

The home of the Arthur Smith family is still standing not far from Smithfield . " Windsor Castle " resembles Gunston Hall ; due to having been built at a much earlier date , it does not have the beautiful panelling to be found in the latter place . The woodwork in the house is plain with quite unusual recessed windows . The old garden with beautiful box which can still be remembered has had to yield precedence to a corn field . The orginal land patent for this estate is still in existence and a descendant owns the seal coat of arms brought over by the immigrant . For several generations this family represented Isle of Wight in the House of Burgesses . The male line became extinct with the fifth Arthur in the early part of the 19th century , but there are still descendants living in the county, of the daughters of the family .

Another place of historical interest whose name has been retained since the earliest days of the county , is " Levy Neck " . The origin of the name is unkown, but it was called this in a deed from John Seward to Wm. Bressie in 1672 . On it was erected the principal Quaker Church in the country and here they had their burying ground , It was evidently used as the yearly meeting place for the Quakers in Virginia, as the reference from the Henrico Monthly Meeting would indicate , when it stated in its records of 1700 that money was gathered toward paying for the " Galereys " built in the yearly meeting house of "Levineck". It is now a negro settlement .

No paper on Isle of Wight families would be complete which failed to pay tribute to the Young family and to acknowledge the gratitude the whole county feels toward these custodians of its records for over a hundred years . During the Revolution Tarleton's Troops made a raid on Smithfield with the intention of destroying the records , but the wife of the deputy -clerk Mr. Frances Young saved them by burying them in a box and a " hair trunk " . This trunk is still a cherished possession of the descendants . Mr. Nathaniel Peyton Young had the records removed to Greenville County and then Brunswick during the ~~Civil War~~ war between the states. . Randall Boothe one of the negroes belonging to the clerk at that time told with much pride of how he had remained in the woods and on the road for days at the time with them . Due to the patriotism and resourcefulness of this family , Isle of Wight one of the original eight shires of Virginia has her records almost complete .

Smithfield was incorporated in 1752 and named for the Arthur Smith family and not for John Smith , as has been erroneously stated many times . The first trustees of the town were Robert Burwell, Arthur Smith , William Hodsden , James Baker, James Dunlop , James Arthur and Joseph Bridger. The surveyor of the town was Jordan Thomas and his plat shows seventy two lots , four streets and two lanes . The site of the town is in the main forks of the Pagan River . From an early period in the history of the colony the forks of this creek had been an important place of trade.

In 1633 a tobacco warehouse was established by legislative act , at or near it . For many years prior to 1752 merchants were engaged in the shipment of agricultural products from this point and a firm was importing foreign goods as early as 1730 . Hence it is evident that this place was a center of trade and commerce long before Smithfield was incorporated . The following is what one writer has to say about the town , " Smithfield has an unparalled history for progressiveness and the failure to hold its creation . It use to have the largest rum, bacon and sugar trade in the country . It made the Smithfield Ham, the peanut industry and near it tradition tells us was made the first mint Julep ". The town has been so modernized and the lovely, quaint old buildings have either been torn down or so remodeled in the name of progressiveness that it is hard to realize now it is a colonial town .

There are still many charming and interesting examples of colonial architecture scattered throughout the county . The toll of them destroyed by fire however is quite large .

Space nor time will permit further mention of the other families of the county among whom may be named the , Marshall , Boykin, Applewhite, Green, Seward, Goodrich , Bond, Reynolds, Jordan, and Fulghams, who laid the foundation so firmly in this section of Virginia .

Bibliography - Morrison's History of Isle of Wight County -; Tylers History of Isle of Wight County - Virginia Historical Magazine , William and Mary College Quarterlies and the Isle of Wight Court records.